

SAVE COLONG bulletin

THE COLONG COMMITTEE • A National Wilderness Society

18 Argyle Street, Sydney, 2000

NUMBER 60

MAY 1980

Registered for posting as a periodical category (B)

Price \$1

RAINFORESTS

In the early 'seventies the battle for rainforests was confined to the preservation of the sub-tropical forests of the Border Ranges. It was waged with determination by two local organisations - the Byron Flora and Fauna Association, and the Border Ranges Preservation Society, both of which found distance from the power centres in Sydney a severe handicap. In June 1975 the Colong Committee adopted the preservation of the Border Ranges rainforests as its principal conservation project, and soon the campaign gained headlines in the city press. The battle has since spread to other threatened areas, and has now become a fight for the preservation of our few substantial rainforest remnants. At our last meeting the opinion was expressed that rainforest preservation was now the No. 1 environmental issue, and that may well be true.

We are not discouraged by the fact that after five years of campaigning no substantial area of rainforest has been preserved. Nothing will be done until the Government is forced to respond to the pressure of public opinion. Our experience in the Colong Caves and Boyd campaigns leads us to expect this to take seven years. In another two years we may expect results, if there is any substantial rainforest unroaded by that time.

The Forestry Commission estimates that there are 300,300 ha. of rainforest left in N.S.W. Only 42,800 ha. of this is subtropical, the remainder being classed as "dry", "warm temperate" and "cool temperate". It is mainly the sub-tropical remnants which we seek to preserve, though we are opposed to the clearing of any native forest anywhere. Much of the 300,300 ha. has been

logged, and much of it is described by the Commission as "depauperate". A rainforest is still described as a rainforest even though, most of the original forest has been removed. Many of the areas so described now consist mainly of weeds and scrub.

The exact area of virgin rainforest remaining doesn't really matter. We know that it once covered substantial areas of the coastal lowlands, that nearly all the lowlands forest has been cleared, (an area such as Terania Creek being exceptional) that logging has extended far up the foothills and to most of the tableland stands, and that only the costs of providing access have preserved the few remaining stands, which are mostly on steep slopes or on top of the ranges. The main facts about rainforest are known, and any number of inquiries on specific areas cannot alter them. Nor can the oft repeated claim of the Forestry Commission that rainforests regenerate be sustained. Dr. Newman has carefully studied the available research material on this subject and concluded from it that rainforest trees take several centuries to reach maturity. The remaining stands cannot be "saved" by simply shuffling them around, as occurred when we were given Lever's Plateau and deprived of Grady's Creek, and as may well occur with Terania Creek.

In its background paper on Terania Creek the Forestry Commission admits some of these facts. On selective logging, its main counter to our environmental claims states:

"Certain classes of trees, notably the mature sawlog trees, will be largely removed, the canopy will be more open, and after a few years the lower understorey will be more dense as the new regeneration responds to the more open canopy above."

The Commission says its policy has undergone a steady transition from active promotion of the use of rainforest timbers during the 1940's and 1950's, to a cautious holding of the status quo in the 1960's and finally in the 1970's to a policy of "phasing down" rainforest logging. The Commission states, however that it "has been caught in the bind of having to meet commitments entered into many decades ago, commitments made with the strong support of, or under direction from the Governments of the day". This is an admission that the principle of "sustained yield" was never followed, or alternatively that the Commission did not know the extent of its rainforest resources and the rate of regeneration. Until the Commission can prove otherwise the Colong Committee will continue to believe that the "phasing down" policy is simply an unavoidable response to the exhaustion of resources.

Far from discouraging the use of this diminishing resource, Government policy, as applied through the Commission, has been to encourage the use of rainforest timbers. Profit on the milling of these timbers is assured by the method of calculating royalty rates, which are described as "being assessed on a residual stumpage basis, determined by deducting all the costs of harvesting, transport and processing from a base rate imputed to the price of certain species". As a result "the average stumpages actually paid for rainforest timbers are consistently lower than for other groups". The Commission admits (after previous strong denials) that "recent analyses suggest that the returns to the Government from the sale of native timbers do not compensate for the cost of managing the forests", and now agrees with our assertion that "One apparently simple solution to this problem is to increase stumpage rates". This has not been done because the price of timber has a direct bearing on housing availability and "Governments have been willing to accept some loss on forest management operations in order to provide an indirect subsidy to the home builder". Even the Forestry Commission, however questions the relevance of this argument "in the case of the diminishing availability of the rainforest timber resource, whose main timber value lies in speciality uses rather than home construction". In other words building has been subsidised by the overcutting of our native forests, and the use of our diminishing and

irreplaceable rainforest specialty timbers for structural purposes subsidised, because it is cheaper to "mine" the forests than to subsidise housing by other means.

The Commission continues to press for the "opening up" of the remaining remnants of rainforest. It has no plans for preserving any of these. There are some small flora reserves, but as the intention to annul the largest of these, Grady's Creek, proves, such reserves will remain only so long as it suits the Commission. Threatened areas include the Border Ranges, Washpool, the Black Scrub, the Forbes River, Boss Mountain and Terania. The campaign for saving the Border Ranges publicised rainforest values, and later campaigns for other areas, have attracted much attention. We believe that most of the remnants are known, but a first step in saving them is to delineate and measure them on large scale maps, a task now under way by the Colong Committee with assistance from a number of volunteers.

Another task of prime importance is a survey of rainforest fauna. It is known that many species are found in rainforests and that many of them are not found elsewhere, but there has been no complete study. The Total Environment Centre has therefore approached the World Wildlife Fund, the National Parks Association and the Australian Conservation Foundation for the funding of a fauna research project on Washpool, and has the support of the Colong Committee. The Committee has already written to the W.W.F. criticising its allocation of funds to research on specific fauna rather than the preservation of habitat, and will follow this up by stressing the value of a fauna study of a rainforest area as support for habitat conservation.

We have made representations for the dedication of Lever's Plateau and the thin strip along the Border which the Government approved as a national park, and will continue to press for the enlargement of the park to include Wiangarie and Roseberry. We are also printing a coloured rainforest poster, in the knowledge that good photography is perhaps our most persuasive argument.

Little can be achieved, however, until

the Government is persuaded to abandon its policy of "mining" our rainforests as a means of subsidising the building industry and providing employment. There are other ways of subsidising housing, other structural materials and other avenues of employment. If these are more costly in money terms than continued rainforest logging, such is the price we must pay for retaining this irreplaceable fragment of our national heritage.

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SUPPORTS COLONG COMMITTEE POLICY

In a policy statement on rainforests, prepared for State Cabinet, the N.P. & W.S. fully supports the Colong Committee's case for the cessation of logging in rainforests. It urges the State Government to halt logging in all publicly owned rainforests and to declare them permanent reserves. It also recommends that all logging and clearing in privately owned rainforest should be stopped. The likelihood of the Forestry Commission's "phasing out" policy being achieved before timber supplies run out is described as questionable "in view of the acknowledged commitment to industry in several districts".

The ban on logging and clearing on privately owned lands is recommended because reduction in availability of timber from publicly owned rainforests could initiate a sudden rise of "liquidation logging" on privately owned lands, resulting in possible destruction of forests important for conservation purposes.

The Colong Committee has for long opposed the Government policy of publicising the case for logging inevitably presented by the Forestry Commission, and muzzling the N.P. and W.S., which we once dubbed "the Silent Service". It is gratifying to know that our protests have been heard and acted upon.

THE WASHPOOL WILDERNESS

Of the rainforest remnants which we seek to preserve, the largest is in the Washpool wilderness area of 26,600 ha. as designated in the Helman study. It is situated north of the Gwydir highway, half way between Grafton and Glen Innes and adjoins Gibraltar Range National Park.

There are two major stands of rainforest, one, the Viper Scrub, in the

undulating country to the south-east and the other the Willowie Scrub, which follows the ridge tops, plateau and eastern fall of the Gibraltar Range. Already a "drying-out" road, as wide in places as the Gwydir Highway, extends 10 kilometres north of the highway to a point near the heart of the Viper Scrub. This is intended to enable the logging of over 1,000 ha. of rainforest. Rodney Falconer describes the Willowie Scrub as follows:

"This is now the largest rainforest stand extant in New South Wales and has been reckoned to be the largest undisturbed coachwood forest in the world by foresters such as A.G. Floyd - probably the foremost authority of NSW rainforests. It is a rich complex of faunal habitats revolving around the predominate warm temperate rainforest. To say animal life is abundant and diverse might seem a gross understatement to any visitor. Depending on the time of day, one is beset by the signs and sounds of tiger cats, gliding possums, pademelons, dingoes, riflebirds, pittas, catbirds, fruit pigeons and a host of small mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians."

In view of the necessity to preserve large areas, if complete species survival is to be achieved (as emphasised by Dr. Bell, Dr. Schaefer, Dr. Clark and other experts at the Border Ranges Inquiry) protection of Washpool from further exploitation must be given high priority.

ZURUCK CAN ERDE (DOWN TO EARTH)

Thanks to Mr. Frank Varry, we now have a translation of the chapter describing the mountains of South Queensland in Werner Grossman's book of the above title. The impression that Lamington Park made on two visitors from Switzerland, the Mecca of tourism, and their intention to return, might well be noted by those authorities which regard rainforests as simply a collection of logs. These forests (if preserved), may well become a greater attraction to tourists from overseas than our cities, which are like modern cities anywhere, our vast arid open spaces, or even our beaches. Werner Grossman gives a vivid description of the beauty of the rainforest, its animals, birds, plants and landscapes. The Colong Committee will be glad to make the translation

available to anyone interested.

REPORT OF INQUIRY INTO THE OFF-ROAD USE OF VEHICLES

This report is now to hand, and it is gratifying that the main environmentally objectional features of ORV use, as described in the submission of the conservation societies, including the Colong Committee, have been accepted in the findings of the Inquiry. These are listed as noise, coastal damage, wilderness impairment, management track damage, other physical damage and impairment of managed lands. On wilderness impairment the Inquiry finds that:

"The use of vehicles in areas with high wilderness value, jeopardise wilderness qualities. The desire to explore and trail-blaze areas of virgin country can cause immeasurable damage to flora and fauna, cutting deep impressions as vehicles tyre-spin their way to gain traction over rough terrain."

On other physical damage the finding is that:

"Narrow trails are widened, hill-sides are rut-scarred, erosion is caused or initiated by off-road vehicles, reserves become and remain scarred, front-end winches ropescar and ruin vegetation, archaeological relics are damaged and the possibility of fires is increased from vehicles and the activities of the users of vehicles."

The State Pollution Control Commission recommends "the adoption of a broad strategy whereby on the one hand suitable areas of land are set aside and managed for the use of off-road vehicles, while on the other, sensitive areas are designated in which all, or certain classes of, recreation vehicle activity is prohibited". This would be effected by legislation to enable the designation of "controlled access" areas in which certain classes of vehicles may operate and "no access" areas in which vehicles are not to be used for recreational activity unless a special permit is granted. "No access" would serve to protect areas of high nature conservation or wilderness value, fragile environments, and areas of historical, geological or archaeological significance. It is also recommended that legislation should provide that,

unless written consent were obtained from land occupiers, it would be an offence to drive a vehicle for recreational purposes on private land.

Provided all actual and potential national parks and wilderness areas were designated as "no access" areas the policy of the Colong Committee would be effected. Formed and maintained roads within these areas would presumably be retained, though some might well be revegetated.

It would appear, however, that between the lands designated as "no access" areas and privately owned lands there would be a "grey" area not covered by the recommendations. Within this "grey" area presumably the "controlled access areas" would be designated. The question then arises - which lands are suitable to be declared controlled access areas, on which ORVs whether licensed or not will be permitted? Some, or all the "adverse effects" described by the inquiry apply to any land, irrespective of title or description. Any vehicle driven "off-road" damages soil, flora and possibly fauna. Asked what type of land his department was prepared to make available for ORV use, the Lands Department representative at the Inquiry could specify only quarries. The Colong Committee would be prepared to go further and allow ORV use in areas clear felled by the Forestry Commission, for pine plantations or woodchipping since natural values therein have already been destroyed, but the fact must be faced that off road traffic virtually anywhere will damage the environment. On maintained roads damage is repaired, elsewhere it is not. For this reason we believe that confining vehicles to maintained roads is the only environmentally acceptable solution.

COMMONWEALTH FUNDS FOR CONSERVATION

Both the financial disadvantages of voluntary conservation organisations and their contribution to environmental preservation have been recognised in the recommendations of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Conservation. It is acknowledged that voluntary conservation organisations contribute to reasoned public debate, to public education and

increasing public awareness of environmental issues. It is recommended that Commonwealth funds be provided to voluntary conservation organisations (other than environment centres) with a \$2 for \$1 matching requirement up to the amount allocated to each group. Commonwealth funds would be provided to the environment centre in each State capital with no requirement to match the allocated amount. Other recommendations include the establishment of a fund to assist voluntary conservation organisations with specific projects and a research fund for the sponsoring of research projects by professional consultants on the basis of advice received from voluntary conservation organisations. Whether the recommendations will be accepted, and whether any gravy will come the way of the Colong Committee, remains to be seen.

ANTI-CONSERVATIONISTS AT WORK

An anti-wilderness Bill, supported by the National Forest Products Association, the American Petroleum Institute, the United Four-Wheel Drive Association and other special interests is to be introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. Not content with more than 100 million acres, the most productive two thirds of the national forests, the timber industry wants, in addition, 36 million acres of the least productive lands, the remnant of the U.S. wilderness heritage, where timber grows slowly because of steep slopes, high elevations and other factors. There is a close parallel with the pressure of the N.S.W. timber interests to log slow growing rainforests, now mainly confined to steep slopes and high elevations.

In Australia sand miners continue lobbying for the mining of national parks. Mr. Ken Horler, executive director of the Mineral Sands Producers' Association, has expressed the opinion that "We may even get to mine Fraser Island again". (SMH report 5/4/80).

In the New England district, Mr. Oliver Moriarty, whose organisation now describes itself as "The Association for the Protection of Rural Australia" has been addressing meetings opposed to the creation of a Beady River National Park. Mr. Eric

Bedford, Minister for Planning and Environment, is to be congratulated on his unequivocal response to this activity. He said in Parliament that Mr. Oliver Moriarty was attempting to frighten rural people into believing the N.S.W. Government wanted to dispossess them of their land. "He has embarked on a crusade of deception to generate fear and inflame rural opinion against the Government's nature policies", Mr. Bedford said. "He wants our national parks divided up among grazing, mining and timber interests. I think Mr. Moriarty should place before the public the full background of his group and declare whether the mining and timber interests are overtly or covertly backing his stand".

COAL MINING IN NATIONAL PARKS

The Colong Committee has joined the NCC, NPA, ACF, Colo Committee and TEC in subscribing to the following policy on underground and surface coal mining in relation to existing and proposed national parks, nature reserves, wilderness areas and other protected sites in NSW.

Principles

1. The existing and proposed national parks and nature reserves, wilderness areas and other protected sites (hereinafter called natural and historic landscapes of NSW) are treasured remnants of the State's natural environment and history. Their qualities and features must be protected for present and future generations, and be inviolate from any disturbance that can arise from underground or surface coal mining.
2. In order to protect water and air quality; wildlife; plant communities; recreational values, aesthetic and other qualities of natural and historic landscapes, and to control access, the concept of a buffer zone in relations to developments outside these areas should be enforced.
3. A substantial margin of safety for natural and historic landscapes should be adopted when assessing the likelihood of any disturbance.

Conflicts

4. There are serious conflicts between natural and social values on the one hand and the operation

of underground and surface coal mining on the other hand, for example:

- (i) Destruction of cliff faces, small gorges, pinnacles, caves and other rock formations, as a result of strata subsidence due to extraction of coal seams. Present subsidence policy of the Mineral Resources and Development Department does not ensure the integrity of surface features.
 - (ii) Mining (especially open cut) is destructive to natural systems and rehabilitation cannot reproduce such systems with their diverse characteristics.
 - (iii) Heavy metal, acid and sediment pollution from operating and abandoned mines, washeries and waste dumps, vent shafts, roads, pitheads, and coal dumps reduce water quality, adversely affect aquatic biota and diminish recreational values of waterways.
 - (iv) The aesthetic impact of coal dumps, washeries, vent shafts, roads, pitheads and other works.
5. We are not satisfied that effective regulations and enforcement agencies exist to protect natural and social values at the present time.
- Policy
6. Surface mining works or open cuts are incompatible with proper management of natural and historic landscapes and should be banned from within their boundaries.
 7. In view of 1-5 above, and considering the extent of the State's coal reserves, a moratorium should be placed on underground mining in natural and historic landscapes.
 8. The NSW Government should establish a decision making process which directs coal mining interest away from natural and historic landscapes, and incorporates a buffer zone for their protection.
 9. The NSW Government should better inform and involve the public and citizen environment organisations in its planning for the development of the State's coal resources.
 10. The NSW Government should prepare and publish for public debate a coal conservation policy, for the orderly and conservative utilisation of coal to maintain coal supplies for NSW

as far into the future as possible and to limit the pollution effects experienced by the NSW public.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Colong Committee was held on 10th April. The following officers were elected:

Chairman: Peter G. Maslen, B.Sc.(Eng.)

M.I.E. (Aust.)

Vice Chairman: James G. Somerville,

A.A.S.A.

Rodney A. Falconer, B.Sc.(Ed.)

Hon. Secretary: Alexander G. Colley,

B.Ec.H.D.A.

Hon. Treasurer: Charles A. Calberg,

A.A.S.A.

The financial statement for the calendar year 1979 was as follows:

Income:

Donations	\$2,948
Sale of Posters	42
Sale of Publications	272
Subscriptions to Bulletin	1,236
Sale of Wilderness	
Calendars (Part only)	709
Interest on Bank Account	47

\$5,254

Expenditure:

Auditors Remuneration	
- Accounting & Secretarial	60
- Audit Fee	175
Bulletin Costs	998
Contributions to other	
Conservation Groups	31
General Expenses	550
Rent	1,300
Colo River Campaign	193
Wilderness Calendars	750

\$4,057

Surplus for year \$1,197

DONATIONS

Response to our annual appeal for donations and renewal of Bulletin subscriptions has been very satisfactory. Our thanks to the following for their donations:

C. Austin	C. Boyd
L. Austwick	R. Braithwaite
J. Ambler	P. Conaghan
J. Barrett	P. Cook
M. Beard	A. Cooper
F. Bendeich	A. Correy
W. Bennett	R. Costin
A. Bowe	E. Cunningham

NUMBER 60

MAY 1980

A. Davies	E. Hanvin	Manly-Warringah	P. Rendell	B. Temple Watts
M. Eden	L. Harrison	Protection Society	H. Seelenmeyer	M. Wallace
A. Edmondson	P. Howard	D. Meares	D. Shoppee	G. Watson
A. Ewing	A. Hunt	J. Messer	J. Simons	B. Weekes
C. Ferguson	L. Hutchinson	R. Newman	F. Smith	M. White
T. Floyd	A. Keen	J. Palmer	T. Smith	I. Williamson
M. Grossman	J. Lawler	L. Philpott	J. Stephenson	J. Williamson
D. Haig	P. McMahon	B. Rayner	E. Stewart	J. Wrigley
L. Hamill		E. Reeve		

and to the following for donations to the Australian Conservation Foundation which enabled the Foundation to make a grant to the Colong Committee:

R. Atkins	B.O. Chick	M. Mills	B. Temple Watts
J.W. Belton	E. Cunningham	N.A. L'Orange	F.M. & M.T. Vanry
J.S. Bentley	M.J. Holmes	P.S. Rendell	J.J. Veevers
P.B. Blaydon	E.H. & N.M.B. Jones	J.H. Stephenson	E.C. Ward
			R.W. Younger

Projects which these donations are financing include:

Purchase of Forestry Commission maps for purpose
of delineating rainforests.
A coloured rainforest poster
Washpool pamphlet (copy enclosed)
A new letterhead for the Committee

PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE BY THE COLONG COMMITTEE: *(Price includes postage)*

The Save Colong Bulletin, Per Annum....\$5.00	Wilderness in Danger,
Kakadu Coloured Poster\$1.50	Michael Bell & Associates....\$7.00
Border Ranges Poster\$1.50	Habitat-Border Ranges Issue....\$1.00
Wilderness in Australia - Helman et al.\$5.00	Rainforests - National Parks
Colo Wilderness - Henry Gold	& Wildlife Service.....\$5.20
and Peter Prineas\$8.50	Colong NSW Wilderness Calendar
	for 1980 (reduced from \$5.50)\$2.00

- * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * - * -

*The Secretary,
The Colong Committee Ltd.,
18 Argyle Street,
SYDNEY. NSW. 2000*

Dear Sir,

I enclose \$5.00 being my subscription to the Save Colong Bulletin for the calendar year 1980.

I enclose \$..... being a donation to the Colong Committee's Fighting Fund.

I have donated \$..... to the Australian Conservation Foundation, expressing a wish that my donation be spent for the purposes of the Colong Committee.

NAME (Mr./Mrs./Miss)

ADDRESS CODE

SIGNED DATE

-----0000000-----

NEW SUBSCRIBERS SOUGHT - Because of the essential role of the Colong Bulletin in publicising our views and encouraging financial support, we are anxious to increase circulation. If you know any potential subscribers, we would be pleased to send them a complimentary copy. Please give below the name and address of any you know of.

.....
.....
.....